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Burma

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Official Name:
Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma

PROFILE

People

Nationality: *Noun and adjective*—Burmese (sing. and pl.). **Population** (1985): 36,392,000. **Annual growth rate:** 2%. **Ethnic groups:** Burman 68%, Shan 9%, Karen 7%, Rakhine 4%, Chinese 3%, Indian 2%. **Religions:** Buddhist 85%; Muslim, animist, Christian, other 13%. **Languages:** Burmese, ethnic languages. **Education:** *Attendance*—84%. *Years compulsory*—4. *Literacy*—66%. **Health:** *Infant mortality rate*—96/1,000. *Life expectancy*—57 yrs. **Work force** (14.8 million est.): *Agriculture*—66.1. *Industry*—12.0%. *Trade*—9.7%. *Government*—10.6%.

Geography

Area: 678,576 sq. km. (262,000 sq. mi.); slightly smaller than Texas. **Cities:** *Capital*—Rangoon (pop. 2.5 million). *Other cities*—Mandalay, Moulmein. **Terrain:** Varied. **Climate:** Tropical, monsoon.

Government

Type: Socialist republic. **Independence:** Jan. 4, 1948. **Constitution:** Jan. 3, 1974.

Branches: *Executive*—president and chairman of the Council of State, prime minister (head of Cabinet). *Legislative*—unicameral People's Assembly (*Pyithu Hluttaw* or People's Congress). *Judicial*—People's Courts, Council of People's Justices, Council of People's Attorneys.

Subdivisions: Seven divisions (ethnic Burman majority) and seven states (non-Burman majority).

Political party: Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP). **Suffrage:** Universal.

Central government budget: $4.368 billion, including expenditures of state economic enterprises.

Defense (1985 est.): 4.2% of GDP.

Flag: Red with blue canton; in the canton, a white cogwheel and rice stalk encircled with 14 white stars.

National holiday: Independence Day, Jan. 4.

Economy

GDP (Burmese FY 1984–85 in current dollars): $6.5 billion. **Annual growth rate:** 1%–4%. **Per capita income:** $179. **Avg. inflation rate** (last 4 yrs.): 6%.

Natural resources: Oil, timber, tin, tungsten, copper, lead, precious stones.

Agriculture (27% of GDP): *Products*—rice, beans and pulses, maize and oilseeds, peanuts, and sugarcane.

Industry (10% of GDP): *Types*—food, textiles, timber products, petroleum, construction materials.

Trade (FY 1984–85): *Exports*—$399 million f.o.b.: rice, teak and hardwoods, base metals and ores. *Major markets*—Japan, Western Europe, ASEAN countries. *Imports*—$648 million f.o.b.: machinery, tools, transportation equipment spare parts. *Major suppliers*—Japan, Western Europe, ASEAN.

Official exchange rate: 1SDR = Kyat 8.51; 7.7 Kyat = US$1 (Jan. 1986).

Fiscal year: April 1–Mar. 31 (since April 1974).

Membership in International Organizations

UN and some of its specialized and related agencies, including the World Bank, International Finance Corporation (IFC), International Development Association (IDA), International Monetary Fund (IMF), General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT); Seabeds Committee, Asian Development Bank, Colombo Plan.

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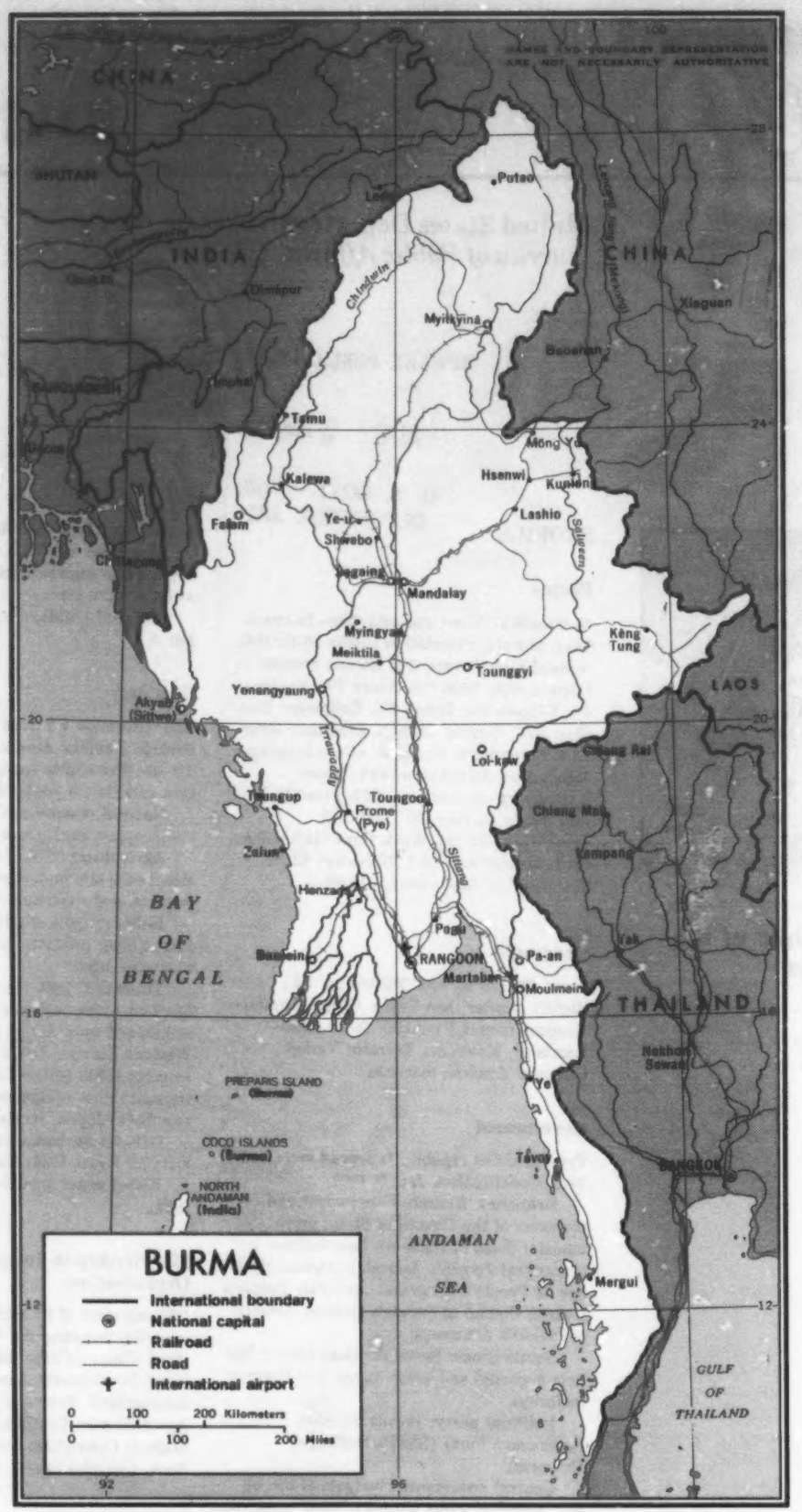
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CHINA
BHUTAN
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Putao
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Salween
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Shwebo
Monywa
Mandalay
Myingyan
Meiktila
Kèng Tung
Taunggyi
LAOS
Yenangyaung
Akyab (Sittwe)
Irrawaddy
Loi-kaw
Chiang Rai
Thongup
Toungoo
Prome (Pye)
Chiang Mai
Zalun
Sittang
Lampang
Henzada
BAY OF BENGAL
Pegu
Yak
Bassein
RANGOON
Martaban
Pa-an
Moulmein
THAILAND
Nakhon Sawan
PREPARIS ISLAND (Burma)
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COCO ISLANDS (Burma)
Tavoy
BANGKOK
NORTH ANDAMAN (India)
ANDAMAN SEA
Mergui
GULF OF THAILAND
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PEOPLE

Burma's predominantly rural population is concentrated in the lower valleys of the Irrawaddy, Chindwin, and Sittang Rivers. The dominant ethnic group—the Burmans—number more than 25 million. More than 2 million Karens live throughout southern and eastern Burma. The Shans, who also number about 2 million, are ethnically related to the Thai and inhabit mainly the eastern plateau region. Other major indigenous groups are the Rakhines in the west, Chins in the northwest, and Kachins in the north—totaling more than 1 million. In addition, large ethnic Chinese, Indian, and Bangladeshi minorities live in Burma. Except for the diplomatic and UN community, there are few Europeans. About 150 Americans reside there.

Theravada Buddhism—an older form of Buddhism prevalent in most of mainland Southeast Asia—is practiced by some 85% of the Burmese. Minority religions include Islam, Christianity, and traditional practices.

Burma's ethnic groups speak many languages and subsidiary dialects. Burmese, related to Tibetan, is spoken by most of the people and is the official national language. English, the second language, is spoken among educated and official elements of society, but its use has declined in recent years. To reverse this trend, the government is expanding English-language instruction.

Government literacy campaigns have contributed to a rising literacy rate. Education is free from primary through university level, and the government is expanding its facilities. An estimated 84% of primary school children (ages 6–9) attend school, usually in half-day sessions. Only a small percentage of older children attend middle and high schools. In rural areas, traditional Buddhist temple schools provide basic skills for primary school children.

Universities are located at Rangoon and Mandalay. In addition, there are four degree-granting colleges; three institutes of medicine; and additional institutes of dental medicine, animal husbandry and veterinary science, economics, technology, education, and foreign languages. Because recent college graduates have had difficulties in finding employment, the government encourages students to attend technical schools, which provide wider employment opportunities.

Burmese laws and customs consider women equal to men. After marriage, women are allowed to keep their names, retain their property, and handle family finances. Here, a Burmese bride awaits her wedding ceremony.

GEOGRAPHY

Burma is the largest country on the Southeast Asian mainland. Facing the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea on the west and south, it shares land borders with Thailand, Laos, China, India, and Bangladesh.

Burma is rimmed on the north, east, and west by mountain ranges, with elevations up to 4,570 meters (15,000 ft.) above sea level along the Chinese border and 2,400 meters (8,000 ft.) along the Indian border. The mountains have contributed to Burma's isolation from neighboring countries, and the rivers and dense forests have discouraged the Burman's east-west movement. The Irrawaddy River is the country's economic lifeline and major transportation system, connecting Rangoon with Mandalay in the central area.

Located at about the same latitude as Mexico, Burma has a tropical monsoon climate. Annual rainfall varies from 500 centimeters (200 in.) in coastal areas to only 77 centimeters (30 in.) in the central "dry zone." Mean annual temperatures range from about 27°C (80°F) in southern Burma to around 24°C (75°F) in the northern lowlands. During the hot season, March–May, temperatures often exceed 38°C (100°F) in central Burma.

HISTORY

First unified during the 11th century by King Anawrahta, Burma remained independent until 1287, when Kublai Khan's Mongol hordes invaded the country and destroyed the political order. A second dynasty was established in 1486 but was plagued by internal disunity, compounded from the mid-16th century on by intermittent wars with Siam (now Thailand). A new dynasty was established in 1752, and the country was reunited under King Alaungpaya. Under Alaungpaya's and his sucessor's rule, Burma repelled Chinese invasion and came into conflict with the British, who were vying with the French for dominance in the area.

Burma was annexed to British India during the three Anglo-Burmese wars between 1824 and 1886. Burma's last king, Thibaw, was exiled by the British, and the entire monarchical system was destroyed. During the colonial era, a large influx of Indians and Chinese, along with the British, came to control much of the country's economy. Burma was separated from India in 1937 and granted a constitution, which provided a limited measure of self-government. Until independence, however, Burma's ethnic minorities were administered under a separate system.

During World War II, the Japanese occupied Burma and granted a fictitious independence under a puppet regime led by anti-British nationalists. These Burmese nationalists later turned against the Japanese and aided the Allied forces in retaking the country.

A coalition of nationalist forces, the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL), emerged as the principal political organization following the Japanese defeat in 1945 and the restoration

(Photos by James Stanfield (c) National Geographic Society)

Further Information

These titles are provided as a general indication of the material published on this country. The Department of State does not endorse unofficial publications.

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of British authority. Under AFPFL leadership, various groups and regions within British Burma eventually joined to form the Union of Burma, which on January 4, 1948, became a fully independent nation outside the Commonwealth of Nations.

During the first decade of independence, the Burmese Government was controlled by the AFPFL, headed by Prime Minister U Nu, who had become president of that organization following the assassination in 1947 of Burma's great wartime and postwar hero, Gen. Aung San. The new government carried on the tradition of parliamentary democracy inherited from the British and was dedicated to the creation of a socialist welfare state.

During the early years of independence the government vigorously consolidated its power and held the union together in the face of revolts by communists and other dissident groups as well as separatist movements among its many ethnic minorities. In 1958, the AFPFL split, however, precipitating a political crisis, which led to an army takeover in September of that year led by the Chief of Staff, Gen. Ne Win. Preserving constitutional forms, Gen. Ne Win set up a "caretaker" government with himself as prime minister and with the limited objective of restoring order and stability necessary for new elections. U Nu and his faction of the AFPFL, renamed the Union Party, won an overwhelming majority in elections held in early 1960, and took office in April of that year.

Despite popular backing, the U Nu government proved ineffective and indecisive in coping with the growing problems of internal security, national unity, and economic development. Difficulties were compounded by factional dissension within the Union Party similar to that which had split the AFPFL in 1958. U Nu's decision to move toward a federal system to placate the minorities provoked fear of the union's dismemberment. Again seizing power, Gen. Ne Win deposed the U Nu government in a coup in March 1962, set aside the constitution, and established a new revolutionary government, which has held power to the present.

Twelve years later, on March 2, 1974 a new, constitutionally elected, single party government was installed. U Ne Win assumed the presidency with mainly the same group of military officers in control. Requirements that military officers in civilian positions resign their commissions have reduced the military appearance of the government structure. Candidates for top positions are recruited frequently from the military, however, and the military generally plays a key role in Burma's power structure.

In August 1981, U Ne Win announced his retirement, effective in November 1981 upon election of his successor by the Council of State. However, as Chairman of the Central Executive Committee of the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP), Ne Win continues to influence Burma's politics.

GOVERNMENT

Following a national referendum in late 1973, a new state constitution was adopted on January 4, 1974, changing the legal name of the country to the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma. Under the provisions of the constitution, nationwide elections have been held in February 1974, February 1978, October 1981, and October 1985 for constituent people's assemblies at the central and local levels.

The government is headed by a 29-member State Council, the chairman of which, U San Yu, is ex officio president of Burma. Four subordinate bodies—Council of Ministers (Cabinet), Council of People's Attorneys, Council of People's Judges, and Council of People's Inspectors—implement policies set by the ruling State Council. The prime minister is chairman of the Council of Ministers and a member of the State Council.

The unicameral People's Assembly includes 489 members elected in 1985 to serve a 4-year term. All senior members of the executive branch are elected from among the legislators. Although nonparty members are permitted to run for public office, lists of candidates are approved by the BSPP, the only legal political party.

The judicial branch bears little resemblance to the British system established in Burma almost 100 years ago. The Supreme Court and High Court were abolished in 1962 and replaced by the Chief Court, consisting of a panel of six judges. This court was abolished in early 1974, along with the Attorney General's Office. Their functions were assumed by the Council of People's Judges and Council of People's Attorneys. A Special Crimes Court system, established by the Ne Win government, was also abolished in 1974. In its place, a nationwide system of People's Courts, functioning at all government levels, has jurisdiction over criminal and civil offenses. Former members of the legal profession serve as judicial officers and as advisers to the three-member court panels composed of ordinary citizens.

The Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma comprises seven states (Shan, Kachin, Chin, Rakhine, Mon, Kayah, and Karen) and seven divisions (Rangoon, Mandalay, Pegu, Sagaing, Magwe, Irrawaddy, and Tenasserim). Administrative control is exercised from Rangoon downward through a system of subordinate executive bodies. People's Councils at these lower levels also have some governmental functions. In addition, a nationwide party apparatus, through a hierarchical system of party cells and committees, exercises policy control over all government activities.

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Rangoon, founded in 1755, has a population of about 2.5 million. The British influence is seen in its grid layout.

Party Leadership

Chairman—U Ne Win
Vice Chairman—U San Yu
General Secretary—U Aye Ko
Joint General Secretary—U Sein Lwin

Principal Government Officials

President—U San Yu
Vice President—U Aye Ko

State Council (formed Nov. 4, 1985)
Chairman—U San Yu
Vice Chairman—U Aye Ko
Secretary—U Sein Lwin
Members—Dr. Maung Maung, U Zaw Win, U Maung Maung Kha, U Chit Hlaing, U Tun Yi, U Hla Tun, U Tun Tin, and 19 others

Council of Ministers
Prime Minister—U Maung Maung Kha
Deputy Prime Ministers—U Tun Tin, Gen. Kyaw Htin
Agriculture and Forests—Brig. Gen. Than Nyunt
Construction—Maj. Gen. Myint Lwin
Cooperatives—U Than Hlaing
Defense—Gen. Kyaw Htin
Education—U Kyaw Nyein
Energy—U Sein Tun
Foreign Affairs—U Ye Goung
Health—U Tun Wai
Home and Religious Affairs—U Min Gaung
Industry (I)—U Tint Swe
Industry (II)—U Maung Cho
Information and Culture—U Aung Kyaw Myint
Livestock and Fisheries—Rear Admiral Maung Maung Win
Mines—U Than Tin
Planning and Finance—U Tun Tin
Social Welfare and Labor—U Ohn Kyaw
Trade—U Khin Maung Gyi
Transport and Communications—U Saw Pru
Chairman, Council of People's Justices—U Tin Aung Hein
Chairman, Council of People's Attorneys—U Myint Maung
Chairman, Council of People's Inspectors—U Ohn Tin

Ambassador to the United States—U Maung Maung Gyi
Ambassador to the United Nations—U Maung Maung Gyi

Burma maintains an embassy in the United States at 2300 S Street, NW., Washington, D.C. 20008 (tel. 202-332-9044). The Burmese Consulate General in New York City and the Burmese Permanent Mission to the United Nations are located at 10 East 77th Street, New York, N.Y. 10021 (tel. 212-535-1310).

POLITICAL CONDITIONS

Since seizing power in 1962, Ne Win's successive regimes attempted thoroughly and radically to transform Burmese society under a program called the "Burmese Way to Socialism." Led by a new elite composed mainly of senior military officers, the program looks for inspiration to an eclectic mixture of Burmese nationalism and Buddhist and socialist ideals. U Nu's former Western-style parliamentary democracy was rejected as promoting disunity and stagnation. The new structure was patterned after East European systems, including the concept of "democratic centralism" and a single-party system. The Burma

Socialist Programme Party was formed in 1962 as a "cadre" party but began recruiting a mass membership after the 1971 First Party Congress. As of the Fifth Party Congress in August 1985, official BSPP membership stood at nearly 2.4 million.

The ruling BSPP's structure closely parallels the government and provides policy guidance to it at all levels. At the national level, it is led by a 280-member Central Committee which is governed by a 17-member Central Executive Committee (CEC). The CEC is headed by a chairman, a vice chairman, a general secretary, and a joint general secretary. Political power is exercised ultimately by the chairman. In addition, the BSPP has affiliated "mass and class organizations," the most important of which are the Peasant's and Worker's Associations and the Lanzin Youth.

The government's economic objectives aim at establishing a centrally controlled economy. Private enterprises have been permitted to continue in agriculture—in which private producers and millers operate within the constraints of government procurement and production quotas—and in several other important areas, including local transportation and retailing.

Since 1962, the Burmese leadership has turned initial opposition to its new program into general acquiescence or support. A pattern of limited political liberalization dating roughly from 1978 has contributed to this goal, and a May 1980 amnesty order resulted in the return to Burma of most remaining ethnic Burman emigre opponents of the Ne Win government, including former Prime Minister U Nu.

Problems of Insurgency

The May 1980 amnesty, while marking the end of most ethnic Burman opposition, did not significantly affect dissatisfaction and insurgency among Burma's ethnic minorities. From 1980 to 1981, secret negotiations were conducted with the Burmese Communist Party and the Kachin Independence Organization, but both failed by May 1981. Kachin, Shan, Karen, and other ethnic insurgencies continue, motivated by demands for secession or autonomy within Burma. Another factor in the insurgency is narcotics production and trafficking. Most insurgent groups depend largely on the narcotics trade for financial existence; and for some, such as the Shan United Army, it is their primary raison d'etre. Perhaps the most critical long-term problem facing the Burmese Government is how to combine political, economic, and military measures to harmonize relations between the central government and the minorities.

The largest insurgency, that of the Burmese Communist Party, dates to 1948. With the almost complete destruction of the old party leadership in an internal power struggle, followed by the 1968 Burmese Army capture of the party headquarters in the Pegu Yoma, the party organization was reconstructed under the Chinese-trained Thakin Ba Thein Tin. The current BCP military organization is concentrated in an area along the Sino-Burmese border east of the Salween River, with its support restricted to local ethnic minorities without roots in the ethnic Burman center of the country. Since 1948, the communist and other insurgencies have seriously taxed the government's resources, but they pose no real threat to the government at present.

ECONOMY

Burma is an agricultural country, although it possesses substantial mineral resources, including lead, zinc, tin, tungsten, and petroleum. Self-sufficient in almost all foodstuffs, it exports significant amounts of rice. Burma's industries include agricultural and wood processing, textiles, footwear, mining, cement, and petroleum extraction and refining. Since the peak of the British colonial economy during the 1930s, Burma's economic progress has been hindered by the destruction of 50% of its capital base during World War II, widespread insurgencies—beginning with independence, which delayed or prevented reconstruction—and aspects of government policy, particularly after 1962, which discouraged capital formation required for development. Probably no other Southeast Asian country suffered such devastation during the war as did Burma. After 1972, limited changes in government economic policy—including efforts to increase rice production with the introduction of new high yield strains of rice and the acceptance of foreign aid—improved economic performance. Weak markets for Burma's export commodities in the mid-1980s, however, have contributed to a new slowdown in economic growth, which is estimated at between 1% and 4%, although official statistics still show a higher figure.

Burma's exports are dominated by commodities. Rice and teak have accounted for as much as 70% of total export earnings in recent years. Other major exports have included metallic ores, beans and pulses, seafood, and gems. Due primarily to a drop in rice export earnings, total exports fell 10% in 1984–85.

Exports to the United States in recent years have averaged between $10 and $15 million and have included teak, shrimp and prawns, and tungsten ore. Imports from the United States have averaged $15 million per year and have included oil service equipment, agricultural chemicals, and heavy machinery.

The Burmese Way to Socialism

Since independence, Burmese economic policies have been based on socialist ideas and the preservation of traditional Buddhist values. Socialism in Burma had its strongest roots in Burmese nationalist opposition to British colonial economic policy, which effectively handed the country's industry, finance, and trade over to British entrepreneurs and to ethnic Indian and Chinese businessmen. An early goal of Burma's leaders was to reduce the economic power of these elements through nationalization; this began in 1948 with the takeover of the famous Irrawaddy Flotilla Company and of British timber concessions. Further moves were hindered by insurgencies.

Ne Win's accession to power in 1962 revived and intensified the nationalization program. Steps taken in 1963 and 1964 included nationalization of all foreign and private banks, imposition of steep tax rates on private businesses, and nationalization of all foreign trade. By the end of 1965, the government had taken control of all important industries. Several hundred other commercial and industrial enterprises were taken over by the government in late 1968 and early 1969.

Although agriculture was not nationalized, government controls were imposed on processing and marketing of agricultural products. Government procurement at official prices of rice and several other key commodities is carried out for export and for domestic resale through official outlets. A direct result of the nationalization program has been the repatriation of many thousands of Indians and Chinese.

Economic policy after 1962 also emphasized self-reliant development and industrialization. Most foreign aid programs in Burma were stopped. Imposition of centralized economic control complemented nationalization.

Economic difficulties resulting from these policies led to limited changes

after 1972. Multilateral and bilateral foreign aid again was encouraged; emphasis on heavy industry was modified to recognize the importance of agriculture, mining, and forestry; a role was recognized for material incentives to production; and tax reforms were instituted. The policies significantly affected the economy, especially agricultural production, which improved the growth rate.

At the August 1985 Party Congress, the government confirmed a willingness to enter into "mutually beneficial economic cooperation" arrangements of limited duration with foreign entities in cases where Burma lacks the necessary capital or technology to exploit its resources. Although this was a restatement of existing policy, in practice Burma has moved extremely slow in this direction. In the fall of 1984, the government did form a joint venture for unspecified purposes with a partially government-owned West German company. This is the only example of "mutually beneficial economic cooperation" to date, and it is not clear that it will be a precedent for other foreign investment in Burma.

Travel Notes

Customs: Tourist travel normally is restricted to major cultural centers and their vicinities, including Rangoon, Mandalay, Pagan, Pegu, and Taunggyi. Hotel and travel arrangements inside Burma for tourists must be handled by Tourist Burma, a branch of the official Hotel and Tourist Corporation. Tourist visas are readily available, but holders of such visas cannot extend stays beyond 7 days. Long-term visas for business trips can be obtained, but special arrangements must be made in advance and approved by the Burmese Government.

Because of internal security problems, travel to the border areas of Burma is prohibited. The import or export of Burmese currency kyats—is forbidden, but foreign currency can be imported without limitation as long as it is declared. At departure, travelers must account for all currency and valuables brought into the country.

Health: Yellow fever inoculation certificates are required for entry of travelers who have been in an infected area within 6 days of arrival. Travelers leaving Burma will need a cholera inoculation certificate if they are going to countries requiring a certificate after travel through endemic cholera areas. Check the latest information. Boil all drinking water. Cholera, tuberculosis, plague, leprosy, and typhoid are endemic to Burma. Malaria, a serious problem in rural areas, is uncommon in Rangoon, but dengue fever is present. Although bacillary and amoebic dysenteries are prevalent, along with various other intestinal parasitic disorders, careful travelers can avoid exposure, at least in major cities.

Telecommunications: Telephone service within Rangoon is adequate; international service is available 24 hours per day, but connections may be delayed. Telegraphic service to and from Burma is often slow. Burma is 11-1/2 hours ahead of eastern standard time.

Transportation: Rangoon is the only place in Burma where travelers are allowed to enter and exit the country. The Burma Airways Corporation (UB) operates flights to and from Bangkok, Singapore, Calcutta, Dhaka, and Kathmandu, and Rangoon's international airport, Mingaladon. No US carriers fly to Burma. Internal UB flights connect Rangoon and the major cities where foreigners are permitted to travel freely. However, space on these flights is limited during the peak tourist season from October until April.

Schedules are often unreliable. Travel by car, train, or river steamer is possible but somewhat arduous. Public transportation in Rangoon and Mandalay is inadequate, unsafe, and overcrowded. Mini-pickups are used as taxis; many are uncomfortable and in poor condition.

Tourist attractions: Mandalay, the second largest city and the last capital of the Burmese kings, has much historical and cultural interest. It is easily reached from Rangoon by train (14-17 hrs.) or plane (2-1/4 hrs.) Travel by river steamer (8-11 days) and by car (30 hrs.) is possible but difficult to arrange.

Pagan, the ancient capital during the golden era of Burmese history, may be reached by a daily flight from Rangoon (1-1/2 hrs.) or with difficulty by car. Modern bus service is unavailable. Adventurous travelers can go to Pagan by river steamer (26 hrs. from Mandalay).

Inle Lake, which lies between Kalaw and Taunggyi, is a favorite tourist spot. Travelers from Rangoon can fly to Heho (1-1/2 hrs.) which is not far from the lake. Sandoway, on the Arakan coast, is the finest accessible beach in Burma. Flights from Rangoon (45 mins.) are available four times a week from November to May.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

Strict neutralism has been the cornerstone of Burmese foreign policy under all governments since 1948. The Burmese consider that such a policy calls for avoiding international commitments, except through international organizations, and an impartial approach to issues between the major powers. Burma was a founding member of the Nonaligned Movement, although it withdrew after the 1979 Havana conference—protesting the violation of principles on which the movement had been organized—and has not returned to it. Burma maintains bilateral relations with the ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) countries but is not interested in joining ASEAN or other regional alliances.

After the 1962 military takeover, Burma's economic, political, and cultural contacts with the outside world were sharply reduced, although a limited modification of this policy was begun in 1971-72. Since 1972, the Burmese Government has begun participating again in the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the Asian Development Bank and has entered into bilateral economic assistance agreements with individual countries, including the United States, Japan, and the Federal Republic of Germany. In contrast to most other outside contacts, Burma has maintained continuously its membership in the United Nations and many UN-associated organizations.

Burma was the first noncommunist country to recognize the People's Republic of China in 1949. Relations deteriorated during the mid-1960s, when support for the "Cultural Revolution" by some ethnic Chinese led to anti-Chinese riots. During 1970–71, improved relations led to an exchange of ambassadors and a visit to Beijing by Ne Win in August 1971. Sino-Burmese relations have continued to improve since that time and featured an exchange of presidential visits in 1984–85 and a trip to Beijing by Ne Win in May 1985.

Burma has maintained good relations with Japan. The Japanese economic assistance program was almost unique in being maintained throughout the 1962–72 period. Japan is now the largest aid donor to Burma and also the most active in business there.

In 1983, Burma broke relations with North Korea and withdrew recognition of its government, following a North Korean terrorist bomb attack against a visiting presidential delegation from the Republic of Korea.

DEFENSE

Under the Ministry of Defense, the Burmese Armed Forces in 1985 totaled about 215,000 members—198,000 army, 8,000 air force, and 9,000 navy. Paramilitary personnel include a People's Police Force of about 40,000 under the Ministry of Home and Religious Affairs and a People's Militia of about 35,000 men.

Carved teak panels of the Shwe Nandaw Monastery, Mandalay.

Defense expenditures during Burmese fiscal year 1984–85 were $386 million, or 31% of the central government ministerial budget. Burma's strict neutrality and the absence of notable external threats, combined with persistent internal insurgencies, have determined the character of the armed forces. In addition to counterinsurgency, their missions include internal security, territorial defense, assistance to national administration, and civic action.

Burma purchases small amounts of military equipment and training from various countries, including the United States and Western Europe. In addition to providing military training, the United States supplied arms and equipment to Burma valued at about $80 million, from 1958 to 1971. These arrangements were gradually terminated by Burma after 1962, although military training resumed in 1980.

U.S.-BURMA RELATIONS

Historically, the United States and Burma have maintained friendly relations. The United States has long supported Burma's independence and neutral foreign policy. In the first two decades of Burmese independence, this support included substantial assistance to promote economic development and internal security. At Burma's request, this aid was discontinued during the mid-1960s. Projects are underway in the fields of public health and agriculture.

Bilateral relations are based on mutual understanding and cooperation. The United States wishes to see Burma's continued progress as an independent, stable country.

Specific U.S. interests in Burma include continued bilateral cooperation to suppress the illicit narcotics trade, assistance to Burmese economic development, commercial access, and improved educational and cultural contacts between Americans and Burmese.

Since the early 1970s, the Burmese Government has attempted to control illicit drug traffic in its portion of the "Golden Triangle"—the opium-producing area of Burma, Thailand, and Laos. On June 29, 1974, the United States and Burma signed a bilateral agreement, under which the United States has provided the Burmese Government more than $65 million in antinarcotics equipment—primarily helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft. Because some 20% of the heroin reaching the United States originates as opium in the "Golden Triangle," use of this equipment in narcotics suppression directly benefits the United States.

U.S. bilateral economic aid to Burma recommenced in 1980 after a hiatus of 15 years. The USAID (U.S. Agency for International Development) program in Burma concentrates on two sectors—agriculture and health. Burma is currently funding a $9.32 million health project aimed at providing primary health care in its rural townships and villages. USAID has provided a $30 million agricultural grant for maize and oilseeds production. In 1985, USAID signed agreements for new projects in oilseed extraction, refining, and distribution ($9.5 million) and agricultural research and development ($11.3 million). Economic assistance in FY 1985 totaled $14.3 million in grants.

Two U.S. companies signed Asian Development Bank-financed consultancy projects in Burma in 1985, establishing the first U.S. business presence in the country since the 1970s. At the same time, however, U.S. exports to Burma have fallen off in recent years as Burma has cut back imports in the face of declining export earnings.

Between 1962 and 1974, the educational and cultural exchange program was limited to occasional visits by American athletes. Since 1974, this program has gradually expanded to include educators, technical experts, artists, musicians, and cultural groups. In 1980 and 1983, the Fulbright and East-West Center educational exchange programs were reactivated, providing an opportunity for an increasing number of Burmese scholars and professionals to study in the United States. The United States encourages such exchanges as a medium of mutual understanding between the two countries.

Principal U.S. Officials

Ambassador—Daniel A. O'Donohue
Deputy Chief of Mission—
William E. Spruce
Political/Economic Counselor—
James E. Hall
Public Affairs Counselor—
John A. Fredenburg
Defense Attache—Col. Richard S. Kent
Air Attache—Ltc. Dean P. Frohnapple
AID Representative—Earl J. Young

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